



February 22, 2023

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Northwest CT Arts Council **in opposition to HB 6659**. The proposed state budget will cut arts and culture funding back to pre-pandemic levels, which will be devastating to the sector's recovery. It is a fragile and historically under-funded industry that has critical infrastructure needs.

We are the state designated regional arts council for 25 towns in the Litchfield Hills region. Before the pandemic, our organization was severely underfunded and on the verge of closing our doors.

When COVID hit, we were called to action as the arts and culture sector in our region looked to us for guidance. We stood up and took a strong leadership role, immediately raising emergency funds for self-employed arts workers who were out of work and unable to receive unemployment.

Luckily, our increase in responsibility was met with critical emergency State funding. This provided us with a financial safety net and gave us the opportunity to prove what could be done with proper funding.

Thanks to the critical support of the CT Cultural Fund, we were able to secure a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and bring \$150,000 of federal funding into the state to support recovery of the arts & culture sector in our region.

Our work in creating the foundation for a strong arts and culture sector has just begun. If our organization's funding is cut to pre-pandemic levels, we will be at risk of closing our doors once again.

Cutting arts funding will pull the rug out from all of us who have worked so hard over the past 3 years to do emergency recovery within the sector. We need to move forward with strength and build infrastructure to ensure the arts remain a protected part of community life.

Thank you so much for entrusting us to do this work, and for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steph Burr".

Steph Burr, Executive Director

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